



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## Saints Peter & Paul, Apostles | Year A



Saint Peter and Saint Paul, El Greco, 1607



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

*THE PRAYER,  
O LORD MY GOD  
(By Saint Anselm.)*

O Lord my God.  
Teach my heart this day  
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,  
and you have bestowed on me  
all the good things I possess,  
and still I do not know you.  
I have not yet done  
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,  
for I cannot seek you  
unless you teach me,  
or find you  
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;  
let me desire you in my seeking.  
Let me find you by loving you;  
let me love you when I find you.

#### **Catholic Faith, Life & Creed**

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Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
connect with *Catholic  
Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today the Church celebrates the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles.
- ▶ Apostles were considered first eye witnesses to the life, mission, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- ▶ Even though Paul encountered Jesus after the resurrection, he is nevertheless considered an eye-witness (and thus an apostle) since he had a live encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus.
- ▶ The apostles were afforded great honor by the early Christians.
- ▶ Jesus chose both apostles to lead the Church—Peter to be the *Rock* that would build his Church and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.
- ▶ Peter was trained by Jesus himself to establish the Church.
- ▶ Emperor Constantine built a church in their honor as a result of the people's devotion toward these two heroes of the faith.
- ▶ Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome by Nero (54-68).
- ▶ Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified.
- ▶ There is no evidence that both apostles died on the same day, but they have always been honored together nevertheless since the middle of the third century.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

## First Reading: Acts 12:1-12

- ▶ Today's reading relates Peter's rescue from prison.
- ▶ The story echoes other rescue stories of divine origin found in sacred Scripture.
- ▶ The theological significance underpinning this story is *God's rescue of his own mission of salvation*.
- ▶ God can, does and has rescued his own ministers for the sake of his saving work.
- ▶ Biblical history relates other rescues from evil despots.
- ▶ Peter's rescue parallels Jesus' arrest in Luke's Gospel.
- ▶ The Passover reference catapults the reader intentionally to Jesus' Passover from death to life.
- ▶ Connections are to be made between Peter's ordeal at hand and the Jesus event.
- ▶ We are seeing the fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic word to his apostles when he promised they would experience the same trials and tribulations that Jesus endured.
- ▶ The Passover connection echoes the passage of the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt.
- ▶ The text is resplendent with words used in both the exodus event and Peter's arrest today. The angel told Peter to rise and *gird* himself. The Israelites were to eat the Passover meal with their loins *girded*.
- ▶ Peter's rescue functions like a parable—a parable that recalls the exodus. The Church waits for Jesus' return so that we can all be finally, once and for all, delivered into the eternal Promised Land by Christ himself.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What does Peter's rescue have to teach us today?
- ▶ What are the implications of this reading?
- ▶ When you consider your life, when have you or anyone you know ever been rescued by God?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as the opening summary given for each reading.

### Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18

Paul is imprisoned and writing a letter to his friend Timothy about his ordeal and to strengthen Timothy in the midst of his.

- ▶ Paul's second letter to Timothy is reminiscent of the typical farewell address and exhortation in sacred Scripture.
- ▶ Scholars are of a common opinion that Paul did not write this letter and that it was written near the second century AD.
- ▶ Scholars do believe, however, that the text contains fragments of Paul's original words—those fragments are what appear in today's reading from Timothy.
- ▶ Paul is writing from his prison cell; he is awaiting execution.
- ▶ Paul was awaiting a death sentence yet he wrote to his friend Timothy to encourage and exhort his favorite protégé in the trials he was facing. (4: 6-8)
- ▶ *"Life poured out like a libation"*, evokes Greek and Roman culture. Libations of wine were also used in Jewish sacrificial rites.
- ▶ Pagan gods were honored at festivals by pouring wine on the ground.
- ▶ Paul juxtaposed the pagan image as an image of his own life—he too was being poured out—like wine spilled on the ground—in sacrifice for others.
- ▶ Paul insists that he held fast to his faith in Jesus Christ crucified—he never wavered in his belief in Christ's death and resurrection in spite of the persecution he endured.
- ▶ Paul reaffirms what Timothy already knows—he is to remain faithful and steadfast no matter what he is called to endure.
- ▶ Paul insists that he is an icon of what it means to suffer in hope.
- ▶ Paul was challenged and persecuted at every juncture of his ministry, yet he remained steadfast in the face of adversity.
- ▶ The hope of which Paul speaks is rooted in God's love, God kingdom and God's

protection and care. He lives in hope as he awaits the day when Christ will come to take him home. He has no need to fear; he rests secure in what waits for him at the end of his journey.

- ▶ Paul will win the prize—the crown—the olive branch adornment reserved for winning athletes after a special feat of endurance.
- ▶ Paul's participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery will strengthen him and bring him into resurrected, eternal life with God in Christ.
- ▶ The second part of the letter has Paul referring to his hearing or arraignment. No one spoke on his behalf the first time he was arraigned; the same is true of this arraignment. Only Christ stands with him in his time of need.
- ▶ Some interpreters suggest that Paul stood alone as there were many in the Roman community who questioned Paul's orthodoxy.
- ▶ Regardless of their absence, Paul was confident that Christ was his advocate; Christ stood with him to strengthen him for the ordeal he was facing.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ How is Paul's message of endurance a message for you at this time in your life?
- ▶ Have you ever stood alone in a difficulty or trial you were facing? How did that feel? What was Paul's message in the face of such abandonment?
- ▶ What is the hope that Paul expresses in today's reading?
- ▶ Do you possess such hope? Where is such hope to be found in your own life?
- ▶ Why is Christian hope such an important virtue?

## Gospel: Matthew 16: 13-19

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

(Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

## INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL

- ▶ Peter confesses faith in Jesus and Jesus in turn names Peter the leader and rock



upon whom his church was to be built. It is a huge day for Peter!

- ▶ Jesus asked his disciples the question he asks each of us, “Who do you say that I am?” None of us can escape that question. If we want to be Christians in more than name only, we must face that question and answer it honestly.
- ▶ Peter responded and in so doing proclaimed faith in Jesus’ real identity. He did so without having experienced the resurrection. He understood that Jesus was the Messiah (even if not the Messiah they all envisioned.)
- ▶ Peter’s insight was nothing short of miraculous. He not only answered the question for himself, he answered for the entire human race—he answered for the Church itself.
- ▶ Jesus was amazed that God had gifted Peter (someone with innocent, child-like faith) with the wisdom and the revelation of who Jesus was and what he came to accomplish; such *Truth* could only come from God.
- ▶ Peter was thus charged with the task of leading the Church—of establishing the reign of God.
- ▶ Peter would be keeper of the keys that would safeguard and protect the Master’s kingdom.
- ▶ Jesus demonstrated great respect and confidence in Peter to entrust him with so great a task.
- ▶ Jesus entrusted his kingdom—that which he gave his life to establish—to Peter’s competent care.
- ▶ Peter was charged with the role of servant; he was to lead by serving.
- ▶ The apostles knew that they were responsible for efficient management of God’s kingdom and for the vulnerable citizens of that kingdom. They would be held accountable if they neglected to take their role seriously. (John 13:13-17).” Jesus established authority in his Father’s name. He now entrusts that same authority to those who would follow him.
- ▶ They would manage the household he left behind until his return.
- ▶ The binding and loosing’ reference was perhaps a reference to the juridical act of excommunicating people for serious infractions against God and the community and for endangering the community by leading people astray. It was probably a form of an exorcism against the power and the wiles of the devil.
- ▶ All the apostles were given the authority to bind and loose, but only Peter was given the necessary authority and the keys to lead the kingdom.
- ▶ Peter was Jesus’ spokesperson throughout his earthly ministry.
- ▶ Peter’s role notwithstanding, Christ is the heart and center of the Church.
- ▶ Christ and his Spirit continue to be present in the Church and to lead it until his blessed return and the final consummation of the world.
- ▶ The apostles were called to be servants—to humble service of God and God’s people.
- ▶ They were entrusted with passing on Christ’s saving mission to the world.
- ▶ Peter and Paul were distinct personalities; even their mission was unique to each one.
- ▶ Yet there were commonalities between the two men.
- ▶ Peter denied Jesus; Paul persecuted his followers.

- ▶ Peter was impulsive, generous, and at times arrogant. But above all he was faithful.
- ▶ Paul too was arrogant. He was proud of his Roman heritage. He demanded his rightful claim to apostleship and was hurt by those who questioned it.
- ▶ Both men, like Jesus, gave their lives for the kingdom. They willingly embraced martyrdom for the Christ they worshipped and served with all their hearts and all their strength.
- ▶ We too are called to offer our lives in humble, faithful service to the reign of God.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way, if any does this gospel have anything to do with your life at this time in your life?
- ▶ Why do you suppose Jesus chose Peter to lead the Church? Peter denied Jesus and often acted without thinking. What did Jesus see in him? Why is that a hopeful message for you? What does Jesus see in you?
- ▶ Paul was constantly wounded by the Christians (Judaizers). They called him names; they refused to believe that he was an apostle because he did not walk with the Lord when the Lord was on earth. They refused to believe Paul was a true Christian because of his former life of persecuting them. Why is he a good icon for us today? How does Paul's experience resonate with your own life?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel for your life as a disciple of Jesus?
- ▶ In what way are you called to give your life for the kingdom?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

*THE PRAYER,  
O LORD MY GOD  
(By Saint Anselm.)*

*O Lord my God.  
Teach my heart this day  
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,  
and you have bestowed on me  
all the good things I possess,  
and still I do not know you.  
I have not yet done  
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,  
for I cannot seek you  
unless you teach me,  
or find you  
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;  
let me desire you in my seeking.  
Let me find you by loving you;  
let me love you when I find you.*

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.



## APPENDIX

### ► What are the implications of this Gospel for your life as a disciple of Jesus?

I often marvel that Jesus chose Peter to lead the Church. I know there is hope for me. After all, Peter denied him; Peter was always getting it wrong. Yet Peter loved the Lord with his whole heart, mind and soul. He was simply a sinful human being like the rest of us.

I sometimes get frustrated by my own sluggish life of discipleship. I wish I could be more saintly; I wish I would do a better job of turning my life and my will over to God. I wish I could simply abandon my life into God's care. When I consider Peter I am encouraged. He walked with the Lord himself and still got it wrong. He got it wrong a lot!

Paul was constantly upset by how he was treated by his peers. He never quite fit in with the leadership. He was always regarded a second class disciple because he really did not deserve the title of apostle as far as they were concerned. Peter was deeply wounded by the community's rejection of him. I am reminded that similar arguments take place in Christian communities every day.

Yet Peter and Paul are reminders that we are called to love as Jesus loved—love unto death. When we love with self-sacrificing love, the garbage just falls away. If Jesus gave them the strength to love like he loved us, then he will give us the strength too. That is my hope and my assurance.



## Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from the celebration of the liturgy:

Holy Orders

Sacraments

The Church

Liturgical Year

Church Structure

Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

### HOLY ORDERS

Today's liturgy is a perfect occasion to reflect upon what the Church teaches about the sacrament of Holy Orders. We remember Peter, the first Pope and the ministry that has been entrusted to the apostles for all time that is revealed in today's liturgy. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the sacrament of **HOLY ORDERS**.

### CHURCH

Today's Gospel relates the story of Jesus presenting the keys to the kingdom—leadership of the Church. It is thus important to reflect upon what we mean by Church and the theology that underpins how we understand the Church. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on what our Church teaches about the **CHURCH** itself.

### CHURCH STRUCTURE

Today's Gospel relates the story in which Peter was given keys to the kingdom. He was given the authority to lead the Church. The leadership established in today's Gospel continues today in the person of the Pope. It is timely that we focus our attention on the way in which the Church is structured or organized. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on what our Church teaches about **CHURCH STRUCTURE**.

### SACRAMENTS

The ministry of Christ continues in the sacraments. When Jesus departed to return to the throne at his Father's right hand he entrusted his disciples with the command to go and baptize all nations. Peter was given the authority to lead that first band of apostles in the mission that was entrusted to them. That mission continues today in the sacraments of the Church. Sacraments give us access to the ministry Jesus performed while on earth—the ministry that built and established the kingdom and the ministry that addressed the needs of a believing community. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what our Church teaches about **SACRAMENTS**.

## LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

## EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.

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